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## The Struggle to the Storm: Identity and Agency Against Gender Construction in Caroline Bowles Southey's "Pride and Passion"

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The struggle to the storm: Identity and agency against gender construction  
in Caroline Bowles Southey's *pride and passion*

by

Holly M. Hedberg

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout centuries, society has worked to limit, conform, and constrain individuals to act and perform according to specific standards. Mostly patriarchal, these societies also work to affix gender to sex and thus limit the actions of men and women to traits correspondingly masculine and feminine. While men suffer from this sort of construction as well, those feminine attributes more often require the complete overtaking of an individual, creating a divide between a woman's self, her identity, and authority with her femininity. This could not be truer in 19<sup>th</sup> - century England, and throughout the play *Pride and Passion* by Caroline Bowles Southey, Bowles demonstrates the struggle between an individual's choices and a society's constraints through the emotional love quarrel between characters Helena and Hargrave.

Caroline Bowles was a woman with an early knack for writing. Born close to Lymington, Hampshire to doting parents, she was encouraged early in life to explore her talent for writing (Blain 14-15). Her education was lacking however; as biographer Virginia Blain explains that neither of her parents seemed "to have had any real idea of offering such a gifted child adequate intellectual stimulation" (Blain 19). Though her childhood was spent in the good company of her family, Bowles learned early on in life the hardships that came with being a woman in 19<sup>th</sup> - century England. As she experienced the deaths of her mother, her nurse, and then her father, Bowles relied upon her writing talents to make ends meet as she also struggled with poor health (Blain 18-23). More famously known was Caroline's friend, who later became her husband: Robert Southey. Blain writes, "Although he was immediately convinced of her genius, he felt, he said, that she needed more of the precision of thought and language for which women's education fits them badly" (Blain 23). This observation provides a mere glimpse at the world from which Bowles wrote; it was one that gave women little room for education and publication.

Robert Southey exists as a more identifiable figure of the time, and his writing remains part of the literary canon that commonly refuses entrance to his wife. While Blain argues that Caroline was “drawn to contribute her poems and prose sketches to this [*Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*] masculine stronghold...she was by no means – initially at least – a feminist” (Blain 74). However, her husband, as noted by Blain, “had a reputation for...his readiness to help both women and working-class poets to find their way into print” (Blain 21). He was also involved in the abolition movement during the time. Though it remains presumptuous to assume these political views of Robert Southey’s could rub off on Bowles, there was a literary circle during this time that Robert belonged to that supported the more radical notions that women should have access to better education, and were entitled to certain rights. Men such as Joseph Johnson, William Blake, John Stedman and women like Mary Wollstonecraft, Catherine Macaulay, Mary Hays and Marion Reid made up these groups of progressive, like-minded individuals. It would not be too far of a stretch, then, to infer that someone of Bowles’ intelligence and independence would begin questioning the societal restraints placed upon her gender. She did not marry Robert Southey until she was 52.

In fact, according to *British Literature*, “‘The rights of woman’ question was fiercely debated throughout this historical period (1780-1830)” (Mellor and Matlak 31). There was a general belief, during this time, that women were inferior in nature to men in both rationality and morality, but “could be trained to be virtuous” (Mellor and Matlak 31). British society was patriarchal, and the hegemony of the time dictated women’s bodies, children, and possessions “inherited or earned...belonged by law to their fathers or husbands” (Mellor and Matlak 31). In summation, women were viewed as the weaker sex both emotionally and physically. Their only social obligation and responsibility was to bear and care for their children and to take care of

domestic duties, under their husband's or father's supervision (Mellor and Matlak 31). Education for women was lacking and legal rights were few.

Feminists during this time in Great Britain were active in voicing concerns that women faced. Though not an acclaimed feminist herself, Bowles would have been familiar with the work of feminists. Women were confined to the private sphere, but other female writers such as Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte were presenting this as a social problem in their novels. The main fight for feminists revolved around the right for women to have an education: "They insisted that women should be educated in the same way as men, should perform the same economic and social roles as men, and should enjoy the same civil rights, including the vote" (Mellor and Matlak 31). Activists such as John Stuart Mill, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Marion Reid wished to alleviate women's oppression. Bowles would, in all likelihood, have been aware of these social issues and pressures placed upon women, as well as the general oppression of women as well. Importantly, "women writers of the day staked out other progressive positions" which included attacks on sexual double standards, economic inequality, and class differences between female workers (Mellor and Matlak 31-32). The very absence of many of these women writers in the broader, more modern literary canon taught today reveals the reception of such material at the time. Often, these works were considered radical and went unacknowledged. The fact that Bowles' play *Pride and Passion* (1822) has never been performed may exist as evidence of the culture from which she wrote.

Furthermore, *Pride and Passion* was written during an important historical time in literature. The Romantic period marked the transition of England into industrialization. The rise of factories brought workers and with workers came the fight for rights (Wu xxxi). Revolutions were taking place in America and France during this period, and Britain was caught up in war as

well; however, “war even on a global scale could not of itself suppress the desire for just government” (Wu xxxii). The political implications of unrest equaled higher taxes that targeted working people, an action which resonated in an “intense resentment, particularly at a time of bad harvests and record unemployment” (Wu xxxii). The rise of media development further influenced this period as, “This was the first period in history in which the population could keep abreast of political developments through newsprint” (Wu xxxiii). Though women largely lacked a formal education, most middle class women were taught to read and so information became increasingly accessible to them. In addition, according to Wu, it was not only “well-educated poets...who kept up with the news: it was now available to the illiterate and the poor” (Wu xxxiii). Often, one copy would be purchased and then read aloud to a crowd of people (Wu xxxiii). In total, the Romantic period represents a time in which important human rights issues were evaluated. The rights for workers and women, and the abolition of slavery are common themes throughout the literary works produced in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century by forward thinkers and progressive individuals.

Taking into account the period in which Bowles wrote *Pride and Passion* as well as the political climate and cultural expectations for her gender, it seems that her character Helena’s struggle with femininity is something all too familiar for a 19<sup>th</sup>-century woman. I have chosen to use feminist theory as my lens for analysis of this play. According to Leslie Rebecca Bloom, “within the diversity of perspectives, there are a number of common concepts across the different strands of feminist social science that make it possible to assert that there are multiple feminist methodologies” (Bloom 139). For the purpose of this paper, I have focused intently on the social construction of gender. This perspective critiques the human construction of “a binary gender/sex system in which women are hierarchically placed below or subsumed by men”

(Bloom 139). Through societal forces and religious doctrine, the ways in which a woman can perform her gender are restricted by the hegemony. I argue that this conflicts with a more innate identity of self, and that Helena struggles with this conflict internally, which Bowles portrays externally through a literal argument and a violent outburst from Helena. I argue that Sophia, Helena's sister, represents femininity as constructed by society and that Helena's violent outbursts and many transformations throughout the play represent her internal struggle with her own femininity against her truer identity. According to Bloom, "In feminist theory and methodology, gender has been one of the fundamental categories used for analyzing and critiquing social and political relations and systems" (Bloom 139). It is through this particular feminist perspective that I examine the role of gender in this play, and how it works against the main character's identity and agency, and in sum, her authority.

The counter argument to gender construction would be an essentialist position. This position argues that "females have an unchanging essence of femininity that is not socially, historically, or culturally constructed" (Bloom 142). I argue that this position is what Sophia and Hargrave use to transform Helena and to tempt her to change her mind about leaving Hargrave. However, their arguments work only for a short time until, as I demonstrate later, Helena's internal struggle manifests into something larger, taking her out of her body (that site of women's weakness) and exploding literally into a violent storm encompassing the garden to which she has been tempted. Through a feminist perspective, I examine each of the other characters' roles in Helena's transformation and use textual evidence to support my thesis that Helena represents a woman struggling with her femininity as constructed by society.

In *Pride and Passion*, Helena struggles with her decision to leave Hargrave because of his infidelity and passive confession of it. In doing so, she more largely struggles with her

agency and identity in confrontation with societal expectations for her gender. Through the visual aid of Sophia, Helena's sister, the audience sees a literal struggle between the two that works as representation of the inner struggle Helena faces. Through themes of religion, nature, promises and blame, I will demonstrate how this play literally acts out the inner struggle for a woman confronted by her femininity and her attempt at suppressing and then submitting to the gender limits constructed by her society.

This play unfolds in two scenes, and I examine each scene and compare and contrast different scenic devices and characters' reactions. I also perform a close reading of the play to unfold what the text says literally and metaphorically. With character dialogue as evidence, I work to give an analysis of this play as one with moral lessons that reflect the inner struggle for women who wish to express themselves outside gender constraints, and also work to reconcile perceived femininity with a truer vision of self. I use textual evidence to demonstrate the transformations Helena makes throughout the play, and to show how her inner struggle with her femininity wars with her inner nature, and how that inner nature becomes juxtaposed and synonymous to the natural environment. Throughout the play, Helena's inner struggle manifests itself into a literal assault and then, more largely, into a brewing storm. With these textual clues, I analyze how Sophia acts as the social guide and/or sub-ego for Helena in an attempt to counter her decisions. Through Sophia, the inner struggle for Helena becomes a real argument, and I argue that a more meaningful dialogue takes place in these lines, and that the person Helena really addresses is her own femininity and the society that constrains her.



## Chapter 2: The Struggle

Beginning with scene one of this two-scene play, I first work to examine the open conflict that lies between Helena and her fiancé Hargrave. This scene opens up with Hargrave and Helena in deep conversation in a breakfast parlour in Helena's country house. Helena has found out that Hargrave, her fiancé, has broken vows made to her while he was overseas at war, in the form of a relationship he carried on with a slave named Abra. Helena, unmoved by Hargrave's excuses, berates him for his dishonesty in the matter, focusing intently on the fact that this relationship was unmasked by another source than Hargrave. Hargrave, for his part, takes this opportunity to confess his guilt and apologize, though he mostly seems sorry that someone has told Helena his secret, and that he himself did not tell her first. Hargrave laments, "I do confess,/ That in one point I still, still greatly erred – I should have told thee all" (156). This informs the audience that he has given only a partial confession, if any at all, and this is where the apology lies. For the act of infidelity, Hargrave never actually takes responsibility. This part of the scene thrives with finger pointing by Hargrave, and every finger wags away from himself. As he recounts his story, he sets up the scene for Helena and describes the frantic climate he faced in a country rife with war and doomed with plague, "Where death in all his terrors reigned supreme" and in which "All Nature's ties,/ All human sympathies, were broken down" (158). By his account, relationships were upturned and spouses were leaving spouses, so all conventional understanding of loyalty was broken. This upheaval of society in the face of disaster sets up a place for blame; it was the setting he was in and he was but a part of it. Death clearly had taken hold of all things natural and reasonable and it was only out of desperation and illness that the affair occurred the way it did. He laments how his soldier's fate "led me to foreign lands, through many scenes/ Of hardship, danger, death" (157). This removes responsibility from him,

and even makes him seem like a victim; he describes his illness and brush with death which works to heighten the confusion of the situation and eliminates true guilt.

Hargrave goes on to describe his infidelity, though here again he really only skims around the outset of it, choosing to focus on Abra's care for him in his illness. He explains that he fell ill with no one in the world to care for him but Abra, and describes how he should have died but for "that one kind wretch" (158). Her long hours of nursing him back to health boast a sort of relief which Hargrave clings to; in effect, it is as though he *owed* Abra something in return for her care for him. He goes into another fit of blame when describing how someone "Wearing the mask of friendship, came betwixt us,/ And counseled me" encouraging him to hide his "shame" and save Helena the "insult of a story" (162). Through the retelling, he repents, but goes back and forth between repenting for his guilty conscience and blaming his actions and the resultant situation with Helena on other circumstances. He then pleads for her to take pity, have mercy, feel sorry for him and when she holds fast to her decision to call off the wedding, he lastly blames her. He lashes out, "But now I see it all – you never loved me, or, if you did, some other, newer choice -" (164). Helena cuts him off before he can finish, and indignantly refutes his accusation. However, the residue of his words leaves a cloud of blame over all that he apologizes for. From the death-filled land, to the two-sided friend, and further to Helena's own character, the truth remains that Hargrave, for all his pining and begging, has not completely accepted his own responsibility. His entire account leaves an impression of selfishness about him, and his truly heartfelt confession of repentance substantially eliminates his moral capacity for responsibility. He reveals, "At last, I offered for atonement up the broken heart of Abra. Yes, she died" (161). Atonement? So she, Abra, has paid the ultimate price for her part in the

infidelity - her life - and yet Hargrave contributes this offering as his own atonement, which paints him as the selfish party in this plight.

As for Abra, “A poor Mulatto girl – a slave,” little discussion exists of her position (158). The actual account of their infidelity remains carefully skirted, and all that stems from this sexual or non sexual love affair seems to reflect the betrayal of Hargrave’s promises. Abra’s condition as a slave perhaps presents her as a sort of adjunct: a subject literally constrained by social and legal forces that echo the implied restraints on the feminine, as her position of lover reflects the freedom with which masculinity reigns. When Hargrave states his love for Helena to Abra there seems no jealousy to abound, but only a desperate thought: “Perhaps...if *you* would ask it of her,/ The English lady – your – your wife, would take/ Abra for slave” (160). The italicized “*you*” implies the influence of male dominance in this relationship between Hargrave and Helena; however, Helena’s status as “The English lady” gives her still more power over Abra. This short conversation wages a deep argument for the hierarchy of the time: masculinity over femininity, but also white domination over blacks. The character of Abra adds a new dimension to the play, one that critiques not only a woman’s struggle with societal forces and religious teachings, but also race relationships and one’s power to dominate and own another. Interestingly, Hargrave confesses “*Me*, her destroyer – for the stroke was *home/ Unerring* when I told her we must part” (161). This confession ironically displaces blame, once again, the only type of blame Hargrave seems to identify as his own. Despite the fact that Abra probably died from his illness, or that he refused to take her back with him to save her, Hargrave simply dismisses her death as cause of his departure; returning with only his guilt and his determination to take Helena as his bride.

Helena seems unmoved by this account of Hargrave's illness. In fact, she remains steadfast in her decision to end the engagement: "you were still/ Consistent in deception, and for me/ No more remains" (163). For Helena, the relationship between Hargrave and Abra, whether sexual or not, seems less important than the underlying implication; Hargrave broke vows he made to her and has deceived her. The vague account of Hargrave's relationship with Abra leaves room for assumptions, as well as the theme of breaking vows. Clearly, it seems something vulgar has been revealed to Helena by the unnamed friend, and Abra's care for Hargrave stemmed from something deeper than friendship. Vows act as another theme in this scene, a theme that runs throughout the course of the play and one that presents the most difficulty for Helena. The broken vows rendered from the aftermath of Hargrave's confession seem to be his most unforgivable action. She focuses little attention on any sexual act, and asks nothing regarding an intimate relationship but questions only the validity of Hargrave's word. She asks him outright, "With thy polluted vows – would'st thou have dared/ approach with me the holy sanctuary,/ that consciousness of guilt upon thy soul?" (156). Further along in the conversation she rebukes him for his "unmeaning vows" and he responds with fervor, lamenting the "solemn vows" he spoke upon departure to those foreign lands and re-asserting the "purer vows" he has since spoken (157). For Helena, this remains the crux of her problem; that for all the forgiveness she can muster, she cannot forget the blatant disregard for promises Hargrave made, and those vows before God he would have taken, knowing full well those vows were tainted with guilt and shame. This discussion of vows may act as the first place we see Helena's struggle with her femininity. To forgive, but to remain steadfast in her decision to break off the engagement is a struggle for Helena, but this choice underlies a more fundamental resolve: to separate from one's

gender identification and ignore societal forces that dictate how one should behave operates as a particularly rebellious and defiant act.

As a reproach, Hargrave confronts the debate about vows that stems from his confession and throws the religious context right back at Helena; he argues that under religious guidance, she should be forgiving. He states “Yet *God* forgives! And you *His creature* also,/ and, therefore Helen! Liable to err,/ Have you no mercy? No relenting softness?” (163). He uses religion to ease into another argument: are you not feminine enough to forgive me? He argues, “No touch of woman’s own peculiar gift,/ absolving pity?” (164). Quite calmly, and rationally, Helena responds to this by first stating that she can forgive, even feel pity, but that “*thence* I swerve not – we must/ part-” (164). She then accounts for her own un-feminine traits as fault, saying “I know my faults – I have a passionate spirit,/ a passionate, proud spirit – proudly cold,/ reserved, indiff’rent to the common eye – /not prone to sudden friendship – easy trust – /affection...” (165). These traits commonly reflect more masculine stereotypes and so, for Helena, subsist as faults of her own, a place for self-blame for her unwavering decision to end this relationship. This example of insight into Helena’s character offers a look at what she represents: the uncommon, the different, the opposite of what was expected for her time. This conversation also points to the heart of Helena’s true dissonance: the unreasonable societal expectations for women, for femininity, upheld by religious interpretations that converge to commit the 19<sup>th</sup>-century woman into submission by assigning specific gender constraints to her sex.

The end of this conversation between Hargrave and Helena reveals a moment of softness in the dialogue. Hargrave, for a moment, finds weakness in Helena and jumps at the opportunity to once again plead his case. “There *is* a melting softness in thine eyes!/ Oh! do not hide it – do not dash it away/ That gracious tear – ‘tis Heav’n’s own messenger, of peace and hope, to a

repentant soul” pleads Hargrave to which Helena quickly responds, “‘Tis the last coward sign of woman’s weakness” (166). Here, it becomes clear that some sort of discord exists within Helena, a certain wrestling with her feelings, but also something deeper. She fights not only with her emotions, but with her own femininity. For Helena to stick to her decision to leave Hargrave, to accept no less than utter fidelity from her partner and to cast off a man whose vows have proved unmeaning, she must cast off her femininity, her expected role as woman in her society and fall victim to her faults, those more masculine traits of her identity.

At this point in the conversation, however, she cannot be swayed; at the last prompting of Hargrave, “Oh speak it Helena! – one word!/" she holds strong and replies, “Farewell!” (167). The audience then adjusts to changing characters by a brief description as Hargrave departs. Helena is left leaning on the mantle-piece with her face buried in her arms as her sister Sophia enters the room (167-168). Sophia acts as a counterpart to Helena’s inner struggle with femininity. Her character seems to act as sub-ego or subconscious to Helena’s character. While Helena demonstrates those un-feminine qualities and struggles with her decision to end her engagement, Sophia counteracts these qualities with her own pleading. She unravels Helena’s strength and confidence in her decision, working against her during the entire beginning of this scene. Sophia has apparently just met Hargrave leaving the house. She describes him thusly:

I met him rushing wildly from the house:

He would have passed me, but I spoke, and then

He started, stopt, and caught, and wrung my hand:

began some rapid, incoherent sentence,

I scarce know what ...

Said, “Farewell, sister!” and was gone... (169).

This unseen interaction between Sophia and Hargrave works as a point at which the audience may allow for an alliance between the two. Sophia's first appearance begins with rebuke, "Misguided sister! – Oh! for all the/ world/ I would not have to answer as you may,/ For the unhappy fruits of this rash action" (168). This line acts as counterargument to Helena's decision, an argument Helena herself had considered during her conversation with Hargrave. The narrator remarks, as Hargrave leaves, that "Helena makes a motion as if to/ recall him, - but quickly recovers herself" (167). This shows her uncertainty for her decision which is reflected in her sister's remonstrance. Helena responds, "Well, well, *your* conscience is not burthened with it" (168). In the context of the play, she speaks to Sophia, but it may serve as a rhetorical argument towards her feminine side. Perhaps the inner struggle between her own true self and that of society's construction has left a schism for which one side must now bear the guilt of her decision, leaving the weaker side unburdened.

Dialogue between the sisters continues and rises in emotion. Sophia fills the tense scene with emotional appeal for Hargrave and berates her sister, arguing "How could you drive him forth in such a state?" (169). Again, the concept of vows takes force, as Sophia reminds Helena of the "Pledged vows of mutual faith" taken between the two to which Helena quickly defends, "*He* has broken – " (170). This quickly follows with a discussion between the two sisters about the messenger that has delivered the news of Hargrave's indiscretion. It seems understood this was a friend of Hargrave's, as mentioned earlier, but little else is revealed. The audience does not know what exactly this man has told Helena, or what Hargrave had told him. Apparently, the man has given advice to Hargrave to keep silent about his affair, but in turn has gone to Helena to tell her Hargrave's secret. As I argue, Hargrave and Sophia both possess qualities attributable to the snake in the garden with Adam and Eve; however, this unnamed man also presents snake-

like qualities, adding another to the list of people in this play who work to tempt Helena into making some sort of decision. Interestingly, it is a man, and he is the only other person in this play, though barely mentioned, who actually seems to support a decision to leave Hargrave. By telling Hargrave's secret, he has given Helena authority to make a decision and all the information she needs in order to do so. In a sense, he may be the only ally Helena has when she decides that she and Hargrave must part. Perhaps this unnamed, secret acquaintance represents that masculine side of Helena, or at least a mere glimpse at her true inner self. The appalling feelings both Hargrave and Sophia have for this man are clear. Sophia states "I ever thought you gen'rous, noble/ minded:/ Yet you give credence to the vile asperations/ Of that insidious wretch" to which Helena rebuts "He! The contemptible! I spurned him/ from me,/ He and his lies with indigent scorn!" (170). Sophia jumps on the word "lies" and exclaims, "Then it *was* false! – I knew it!" For which Helena then explains, "Partly false,/ But much remained, I never had received/ As truth, from any lips save Hargrave's own" (170).

I include this lengthy dialogue for two reasons. One, it reiterates the contempt Helena has for Hargrave's forced confession and the fact he did not tell her first, and secondly because this piece of dialogue gives credit to Helena's more rational approach to this emotional situation. An unnamed man has spilled Hargrave's secret and in return, Helena sends him away as a liar. She chooses, however, to confront Hargrave for the truth and takes no judgment against him until she hears for herself his story. And, seemingly again, the lack of honesty and fidelity to vows has led her to this final decision; we do not know what the outcome would have been had Hargrave taken the initiative to tell Helena outright minus the third party messenger. Helena argues, "I *could* forgive the crime – but its effect,/ That mean deception" (170). This lack of honesty irks Helena, and perhaps reveals where she finds her agency diminished. Does she, as his lover and



betrothed, not deserve the right to unbroken vows? And if those vows are broken, does she still not deserve to be informed? She argues

He! he! confessed – telling the tale, indeed,

With such extenuating circumstance,

That had I learnt it first from his own act

Of honorable, self-accusing candor-

I might- I might have proved a fond, weak

woman:

I *could* forgive the crime – but its effect,

That mean deception...

The fond, deceived, confiding fool he thought me! (170-171).

The information she has received from “that base Trevylian” adds insult to injury and eliminates Helena’s agency and standing as a person of worth (170). The separation in the dialogue of the word “woman” places emphasis on its link to “fond, weak” characteristics and the act of forgiveness, not of the crime but of the deception. It also acts as a directive for the reader, since this play was never performed and only read, because when viewing the page, “woman” stands alone in the text and marks the real cause of discord. Helena’s identity as woman is the real conflict in this drama, set to the backdrop of a lovers’ quarrel. It seems also that Helena accepts the “extenuating circumstance” and so, the fact that Hargrave claims no responsibility for his actions remains unimportant to Helena. The deceit she feels in his lack of honesty, thus denying her any true agency, overrides the lack of culpability on his part.

In any case, the dialogue between the sisters heightens in emotional intensity as their debate escalates. Sophia points out that “there is a heinous sin called Pride/ It pulled the angels

down from Heaven to Hell” which correlates back to Hargrave’s earlier protest that if Helena be not womanly enough for forgiveness, can she not at least succumb to religious ardor? But, as Helena seems to gain confidence in the debate, she rebuts this effectively by asking, “Art *thou* an angel, to rebuke me thus?” (171). This quick witted reply bears more than just a rhetorical question to Sophia’s sensitive pining. This question may thus be posed inwardly to Helena’s own conscience, to her imposed femininity, or even more widely to society itself: why must *I* always answer to *you*? This single question gives back agency to Helena that Hargrave’s denial of openness diminished. It is also the beginning of her thoughtful and well-formed rebuttal to further berating with religious arguments by Sophia. After Sophia lists appropriate quotes from scripture that argue for mercy and forgiveness, Helena humbly replies “I cannot quote as thou dost, sacred texts/ To illustrate all subjects – yet I read/ And reverence the Scriptures – and I think/ ‘Tis Somewhere written – ‘Have no fellowship/ With the deceitful’ (172). Here, again, the audience sees Helena’s astute wit and rhetoric, but also her rationality as an individual. Her identity, pure and simple, remains in spite of strict application of societal norms and religious deference. However, Helena quickly points out a passage that justifiably sides with her decision to end the engagement, thus removing herself from Hargrave who has proven deceitful and who has unreasonable expectations of feminine qualities on her part.

While the dialogue increases the emotional drama, the words themselves seem to become more and more introverted. The final outburst of exclamation towards Sophia during this conversation reflects the inner struggle Helena faces against her own femininity and self. She begs,

Peace! – you’ll drive *me* mad!

Go – leave me, I command you – vex me not

Beyond my patience – What! you will not go? –

Then I must fly from persecution (173).

Who really, now, does Helena address? This debate, implied as a visual scene in front of an audience between two sisters, can also be read as an inner argument between the real Helena and her sub-ego. Sophia, as a representation of Helena's conscience, brings forth all arguments in play for the submission of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century woman. Helena, as a woman, should be prone to more sensitive traits and further constrained by religious texts, and Sophia makes sure to throw all of this in front of her as she grapples with her decision. At the beginning of their dialogue, Helena pleads, "In pity, leave me now to mine own thoughts" and earlier, still, she remarks, "It had been more considerate, more kind,/ Not to have broken in upon a moment/ Of feeling – somewhat painful" (169, 168). These lines show Helena's intent to suppress her feelings and stifle the discord that begs reconciliation within her inner self. She asks for Sophia to leave her, by way of asking her "womanly weakness" to leave her, and yet, Sophia presses on until Helena threatens to leave herself. This seems representational of society's pull, that no matter how intuitive her convictions appear to her, the societal restrictions placed upon her are a constant voice in the back of her mind. To be her own authentic self means to suppress those feminine qualities that society argues are innate to her identity. Though she feels unconnected to these attributes, she must confront them and the fact that they constitute her inner struggle to remain true to her decision.

All of this conflict and inner struggle transform to literal violence displayed at the close the sisters' conversation and Helena's resultant outburst. As Helena moves to exit the room, Sophia tries to detain her and Helena "strikes down her sister's hand with violence" (173). Helena's first reaction to what she has done reflects anger: "Obstinate fool! how dare you tempt

me/ thus?" (173). This line remains ambiguous to what temptation Helena addresses. This may be a culmination of anger from the entire conversation, so suggesting that Sophia's arguments as representational of society in general may have truly tempted Helena's ultimate decision. Perhaps she suggests here, angrily, that Sophia's arguments reflect her struggle with what she defines as feminine, masculine, authentic and/or identity. Or, this line may simply reflect her anger at the attempt made to detain her. This word "detain" marks an interesting word choice. It implies constraint, imprisonment and confinement. Sophia's catch at Helena's gown works to literally express what metaphorically has happened. Sophia's words and arguments, which have worked "To melt, persuade, subdue thy stubborn heart," reflect the imposition of society on Helena's identity.

The scene description after the violent outburst characteristically imposes a gendered description of the two: "Sophia shrinks back, her eyes sorrowfully/ fixed upon the ground. Helena stands silently looking on her for a moment" (174). This moment marks the end of all refusals of feminine-like characteristics in Helena, and contradicts her earlier strength as she "with a sudden impulse, flings herself/ down at Sophia's feet, and sobs out" (174). With this one small gesture, all flames of defiance seem smothered and this marks the turning point in Helena's conviction. In absolute agony, Helena bewails, "What! can you forgive me?/ And yet I struck you! – I believe I struck you/ Struck down the gentle hand of the best sister!" to which Sophia replies, "I was in part to blame – I should have/ waited/ Till thy vexed spirit had regained a tone/ Of more composure" (174). Many implications exist within these lines. The first, Helena's comment "I believe I struck you" acts as a question, and reflects uncertainty. Did she strike Sophia? This violent outburst, if resulting from an inner combustion of conflict, thus leaves Helena confused as to whom she argues with and if she has physically lashed out. Did

she strike Sophia or was she striking what Sophia represents? Societal expectations, imposed gender norms, and religious confinements make up the crux of her struggle as manifested in Sophia and so transformed as the argument reached its full height to an explosive burst of anger as a literal violent act. Her confusion lends itself to the validity of the argument that Helena's and Sophia's characters interact as foils, agents of opposition, and represent something internal and organic, something structurally defining in terms of self and identity.

Another implication of this dialogue subsists in Sophia's response. Her claim "I was in part to blame – I should have/ waited" and the following explanation mentioned earlier suggest a small bit of culpability, but in contrast to that of Hargrave's initiative to take blame, which is to not accept blame, but to deflect it on to others (174). The following line "Till thy vexed spirit had regained a tone/ Of more composure" offers insight into where the blame really gets directed: back on to Helena (174). Even more, the words "vexed spirit" suggest that Helena's entire defense for her decisions has proven futile. These words diminish, again, Helena's agency, for all that she constructed through rational action and argument, now leaves her as a hollow form, controlled and taken hold of by something more powerful than self. It becomes not identity or agency that fills Helena with the desire to exit this deceitful relationship, but something sinister and "vexed." The underlying message remains clear; to deny those constructed gender norms and to refuse submission to societal norms is unnatural and insidious. Sophia refers to her "sick/ And harassed spirit" which exists in opposition to her agency (175). This description shows Helena as afflicted, someone not in control of her actions and choices, but acting out from something separate from herself.

The sentiments Helena expresses after slapping Sophia mirror the very inner struggle which afflicted her in the lines:

Ever thus, my sister!  
 Thou art thyself – thy mild forgiving self!  
 Arraigning always for another's faults  
 Thy dove-like nature – I, alas! have heired  
 The fiery rashness of my father's spirit –  
 Our gentle mother bequeathed hers to thee (174).

Here, the characteristics of each are gendered through concrete example. Helena reflects her father's masculine "fiery rashness" and Sophia reflects her mother's feminine forgiveness and mild "dove-like nature." This breakdown of character qualities allows for a break in the inner conflict, as it literally allows for the break in dramatic conflict. It seems after the violent outburst and combustion of coinciding inner conflict, a sort of reconciliation takes place here for Helena's submission to weakness after she falls to Sophia's feet, implying men may act a certain way and women must act another. The dissection of their parents' characteristics seems to act as a catalyst for Helena's acceptance.

A significantly religious intonation follows Helena's dialogue when Sophia states, "Come, dearest! be composed – no more/ of this-/ Not if you love me. – Let me tempt you forth/ Into the garden..." (175). Stepping outside, the girls are removed from the previous room where their argument had escalated into violence. Here, Helena is reverted back to Eve, and Sophia, as temptress, becomes the snake in the garden. After the violent explosion and acceptance of submission, a final look at religiosity exposes the truth of the matter: To accept one's place in society as subordinate to others, and to regale one's gender as cause for weakness, reverts all of those from that sex back into the garden of temptation, of evil, into a place where they cannot escape their original sin. In an archaic twist, Helena walks back into the garden, tempted by her

weak, feminine qualities, repressed by the temptation of temptation itself. To submit to societal restrictions and to mute her own true self, she will forgo agency and accept her original sin and her “essential” femininity.

At the close of this scene, a very sisterly tone envelops the characters and the garden acts as backdrop to the reconciliation of the two. Now that they are enclosed in the security of shady trees and light breeze, the former heat of argument has completely subsided. A doubling occurs here, the foils represented converge and one seems to repress the other, as the scene closes with a monologue from Sophia which equals silence from Helena,

Come, Helen, dear!

To our own seat beneath the twin Acacias –

Thou can’st refuse me nothing in their shade,

For they were planted by our infant hands,

And our dear mother christened them the sisters –

And bade us grow like those young trees together,

Pure as their snowy blossoms – in our hearts

United like their interwoven boughs (175).

The one seat beneath the twin Acacias suggests a merging of the sisters into one, while still reflecting the doubling of their identities. The one rejecting her femininity and the other imposing it have converged at this point to demonstrate an inability to separate identity from society. The reflection of infancy and the concept of growing and blossoming suggest innateness of gender. Sophia implores Helena to recall their sisterly bond and ends the scene with this flowery recollection and description. The mother is brought into this monologue, which recalls the virtue of her “dove-like nature” and “mild” characteristic. There remains no

further mention of the father and his “fiery rashness,” nor does Helena offer any other dialogue. She appears subdued, in fact, taken over by Sophia and entranced in the dialogue that reconstructs her identity for her. Their mother’s wishes for them and their united hearts serve as indoctrination for further acceptance on Helena’s part to embrace her femininity and all those characteristics that it implies. She silences those masculine traits of stubbornness, rationality, and calculated decisiveness and sits quietly beside Sophia, “united” and “interwoven.”

Though the garden, with all its implications I have explored, acts as the specific backdrop to the scene’s closing, Nature is the more expanded setting here. In fact, the final monologue for this scene unites the binary usage of Nature thus far in the play. Nature as one’s identity and Nature as environment work to react with and juxtapose Helena’s inner conflict. Within the text, there exist instances of Nature as equivalent to character, for example Hargrave’s argument, “All Nature’s ties,/ All human sympathies, were broken down” (158). Nature, in this sense, becomes a tangible force, one that has the power to persuade and influence a person’s behavior. Nature’s upheaval, as discussed earlier, provides an excuse for Hargrave’s deceit of Helena. Later, at the end of the first scene, Nature acts as a place of solace, a backdrop for the convergence of the two sisters’ identities and a place for peace of mind. Sophia says,

There’s not,  
methinks,  
A more reviving cordial, for a sick  
And harassed spirit, than the sight of Nature:  
Her rural aspect of untroubled beauty,  
The holy music of her eloquent voice,  
Whispering in every breeze (175).



These lines almost mimic Sophia herself, and act as a description of her presence and its representation. Nature, here, remains akin to femininity and is personified by the pronoun “her.” The qualities of “untroubled beauty” and “eloquent voice/ Whispering” echo feminine-like qualities and work to visually envelop Helena in a feminine sphere. Nature speaks, here, and so seems representative of Sophia, who in fact acts as the sole speaker at the closing of this scene. In essence, she tempts Helena to enter the garden and thus blankets her in feminine scenery, while further tempting her to fully embrace this identity by recalling their earlier infantile nature. She uses the image of the two Acacias to evoke comfort and understanding. By calling upon this image of the two trees, planted by their infant hands, growing together, interwoven and united, Sophia blurs the boundaries between Nature as environment and nature as one’s identity and inner qualities. By feminizing the natural world and then inserting Helena, along with their mother’s intentions, into this world, she forces Helena to accept her own femininity. This acceptance therefore insists that Helena deny their father’s spirit in her and any other masculine traits that prove discordant to societal norms.

### Chapter 3: The Storm

As scene one comes to a close, scene two opens to an evening setting, the garden still visible through glass doors. In fact, the garden now has become a constant backdrop for the rest of the play. Helena and Sophia sit together on a sofa, the scenery description offering few details to their surroundings: “Writing materials, and a folded letter lying/ on a table” (176). This quiet setting allows the reader/viewer to assume that all remains calm between the two sisters and the serene enveloping garden has worked to ease the tension from the previous scene. Sophia comments, “That’s my best sister! then you’ve sent/ your answer?” (176). Hargrave has sent one last letter requesting forgiveness from Helena, to which Sophia has convinced her to respond. It becomes clear that she has responded positively, thus forgiving Hargrave for his past transgressions. The line above shows Sophia commending Helena for now suppressing her stubborn characteristics and fully embracing the kinder, more feminine side of herself. This is the “best” side of her, and it seems the struggle between true self and identity against societal construction of gender has been resolved, with society’s expectations winning out. From here on, the audience views a different Helena, one resolved to forgive and forget the past deceit of Hargrave, and completely intent on saving her engagement. All her past arguments and truths have gone, and she now adheres totally to Sophia’s advice. Sophia, if read as her inner foil, has taken control of the situation and in fact now leads all discussion and decision making.

The opening dialogue between the two sisters sets the tone for the rest of the play. Helena, consumed by anxiety for Hargrave’s return upon receiving her response, now frets impatiently over his absence. Helena laments, “I almost wonder/ It [the letter] has not brought him yet – He thinks, perhaps,/ ‘Twould compromise his dignity to appear/ At the first summons” (176, brackets mine). At this point, Hargrave has taken control along with Sophia. Earlier, as

Hargrave rushed from the house, it was Helena that held the power to call him back or send him away as she pleased. However, with the letter she has sent, she now has lost the power she possessed. By heeding Sophia's advice and falling for her arguments, Helena now awaits at the mercy of Hargrave. She has no agency here, as she waits for his response and in fact, the tables have turned on her and it seems *she* is the one begging forgiveness. Her anxiety increases as she considers her sent reply and Sophia responds,

Nay, Helena! fear nothing –  
 Put not the galling curb of pride, my sister!  
 Upon the gen'rous warmth of virtuous feeling.  
 There *are* occasions (this, I think, is one,  
 Noble forgiveness of repented error,)  
 When it is beautiful to see the heart  
 Burst those unmeaning, selfish, cold restraints,  
 Called in the jargon of a heartless world,  
 Prudent reserve – decorum – proper pride (178).

This speech says much for the change that has taken place in Helena, as well as for the sentiments of the expectations for her. It seems that “pride,” as indicative of the title, exists as a structural theme to the play, and for all its worth, according to Sophia, Helena simply suffers from too much pride. And pride, in religious context, is sinful. However, the last sentence “Prudent reserve – decorum – proper pride” allows for a kind of pride that remains acceptable, one marked by feminine qualities like modesty, earnestness, and virtue. Therefore, “pride” as a characteristic is not so bad, but masculine pride presented by a woman exists as an undesirable quality. The passion expressed by Helena, again indicative in the title, may exert itself as that

masculine pride, and she clearly states passion as a fault as mentioned earlier. The argument of pride, here, testifies that pride must be performed correctly by its correlating gender. Earlier, Sophia rebukes Helena, reminding her “Sister! there is a heinous sin called Pride” (171) and again in this latest speech, she warns her against pride. Helena must express her pride appropriately; gender appropriately.

The rest of this speech also poses a place for examination of Helena’s previous qualities as observed by Sophia. If Sophia represents the conscience of Helena, or some form of a sub-ego, it can be argued that Helena herself struggled with these qualities and found them undesirable. Her decision to end a relationship tainted by infidelity and broken promises reflects, to Sophia, a heart containing “unmeaning, selfish, cold restraints.” The word “selfish,” here, mirrors that masculine undertone that existed discordantly to Helena’s inner femininity. The agency she possessed by turning Hargrave away because of his late confession simmers down to “cold restraint” in this speech, thus further constraining Helena to the rigidity of her gender’s construction. Also, the “Noble forgiveness of repented error” works to trivialize the very large betrayal felt by Helena and gives more credit to Hargrave’s repentance. As discussed earlier, there really was no repentance, no actual acceptance of blame, but mere finger pointing and excuse manufacturing. In fact, the only atonement offered for this deceit was “The broken heart of Abra” (161). This trivialization further represses the authority Helena held previously by arguing for her decision and also suppresses her true identity, allowing for a more complete transformation of her from agent in her own decisions and identity to that of conforming to gender standards put in place by her society.

As time passes in this scene by threads of nervous dialogue, the anxiety felt by the characters, in anticipation of Hargrave’s arrival, becomes enhanced by a brewing storm. Once

again, Nature acts as pre-determiner of behavior and this time it acts in anger. The calm, serene scenery of the garden from the previous scene becomes replaced by an angry, dark setting. Sophia gives the description as “it seemed at sunset/ As if the lightnings (ready to dart out)/ Glared with red wrath behind their volumed dark/ness” (178). Before, it was Helena that held the anger and the natural environment that offered solace. Now, as Helena has transformed into a mild, sensitive character, the natural world glares “with red wrath.” It appears Helena and Nature have traded places, and the storm represents yet another evolution of her inner discord. The struggle she felt before manifested into a literal argument and violent outburst with her sister, and now further suppressed, that inner struggle between self and femininity has manifested into an outburst in the form of a dark, boiling storm. The “volume dark/ness” seems to also suggest a literal, visual place that represents Helena’s inner feelings. She has forgone her decision to be strong, and now, enveloped by weakness and Sophia’s commands, she struggles in turmoil.

The religious undertones follow as theme in this scene, as demonstrated through Nature. Helena states, “There! – what a flash! – that was forked/ lightning, sister” (179). This description subsists reminiscent of a snake with a forked tongue, especially as the scene unfolds around the garden to which Helena was tempted. A break in the lines takes place here, followed by Helena’s statement, “Perhaps he’ll come, as is his custom often,/ Straight through the garden to this door” (179). Earlier, it was suggested Sophia represented the snake; however, it seems plausible that both Sophia and Hargrave echo the snake and its temptation. Both remain the only other characters within the play and both work to tempt Helena to change her mind. The temptation to change her decision overrides her agency and inner self, thus encouraging her to conform and become consumed by a weaker femininity than she earlier expressed. The following lines by Sophia act almost as warning, “Perhaps -/ But if he does, we scarcely shall discern him/

(‘Tis grown so dark) till he is close at hand” (179). This line, following the “forked/ lightning” seems to suggest a mutability about Hargrave, an ability to shift and change, or to remain invisible. The placement of dialogue and pause may further suggest Hargrave represents the snake. These lines conversed between the sisters are set apart from the rest of the dialogue on the page, separated by asterisks. When read, the dialogue visually stands alone, giving the reader a chance to view this text and its description of Hargrave on its own. This adds meaning to the dialogue and may further lend credence to the idea that Hargrave is the snake in the garden, the creature that tempts Helena. Because Helena has now been tempted, and has chosen to forgo her individuality and to converge as one with Sophia, it seems within this garden of good and evil, she has chosen evil. Perhaps this imagery is a bit strong, but good and evil are facets of right and wrong, and in this context, perhaps the moral here is that Helena has chosen wrong.

The scenery continues to darken during this scene until a very sinister appeal overcomes the garden. Sophia exclaims, “What massy blackness shrouds the clust’ring shapes/ Of those tall evergreens! That forward group -/ What gloomy, tomb-like shadows it flings down!” (179). Scene descriptions in this play are sparse, and little movement by the characters is noted by the narrator. Therefore, the reader must rely heavily on dialogue to create imagery and scenic markers. The macabre description lends more to foreshadowing, but also makes a broader contrast between the earlier descriptions of the garden’s trees. Helena responds, “One moved, methought – there! – do you/ see it move?” to which Sophia replies, “’Tis long the tremulous shade of yonder/ cypress/ Waving across the path” (179). Helena remarks, “What stirred its top?/ There’s not a breath of air” (180). A look back on the earlier description of the garden with “Her rural aspect of untroubled beauty” reveals these two sceneries as direct contrasts of each other. After Helena’s violent outburst, she became calmer and milder in temper. The garden, then,

acted as a place of solace, and also a place where the foils of Sophia and Helena converged. Now, however, the garden acts as place of darkness and sinister reproach. Sophia responds to Helena's question of "what stirred its top" with,

Some sudden puff,  
Gone in a moment: - often before thunder  
There are such stifled gaspings, as if nature  
Struggled for breath – and hark! the shiv'ring  
leaves  
(With agitated consciousness, 'twould seem,)  
Announces the coming tempest – there it rolls –  
But very distant (180).

This scenery description works tangentially to remark on the previous scene's end. The natural world, as described here, reflects the description one could place on Helena's and Sophia's previous argument about forgiveness and nature. Helena's outburst was but "Some sudden puff,/ Gone in a moment" and may also be described by "stifled gaspings," as Sophia led her to the garden and continued out the scene in monologue. The "agitated consciousness" seems reflective of the inner struggle Helena had to confront between her own identity and that which society forced upon her. The line "as if nature/ Struggled for breath" may also hold double meaning here. Earlier, I examined Nature as environment and nature as one's innate qualities and characteristics and looked at how those two interact within the play. This line suggests a clear presentation of this as metaphor: Nature literally working through a storm, and Helena's inner nature struggling for breath in the struggle to wrestle her inner identity against her societal constraints. The entire speech seems foreboding in relationship to what lies ahead, while also

meditative on the past interactions that happened literally and metaphorically internally between Helena and Sophia.

As juxtaposition to this dramatic play on words stemming forth from Helena in regards to the storm, Sophia suggests, “We’ll shut it out – I’ll ring for lights” (180). Helena states, “No, no,/ Not for the world – I always loved, you know,/ To watch the awful working of the heavens” (181). It seems Sophia, again, works as repressor and tries here to stifle the storm and its effects. However, Helena welcomes this violent scene and reacts quickly to this attempt at subjugating the storm. Helena allows nature to prevail, to display its outburst and fury, and following this statement, Helena discovers a fatal mistake; “His *own letter* I’ve sent back -/ Here’s mine sealed up – send some one off – fly-/ fly” (181). This reaction following her previous expression for the storm seems to possibly suggest a subconscious awareness of her error. Though outwardly she appears distressed, inwardly this may have been her final struggle for agency. Her statement exclaiming her partiality for the storm and the subsequent discovery of her mistake remains the only possible evidence that she has not fully transformed into Sophia’s wishes and society’s construction.

As soon as Helena discovers her own letter lying on the table undelivered, the scene picks up dramatic pace with “The report of a pistol heard from the garden” (181). The longest bit of narration in the play unfolds a setting moved outside to the garden, with Hargrave leaning on the ground, head resting upon Helena’s shoulder and her kneeling beside him with a pistol lying nearby (182). Several servants bustle around the area taking commands from Sophia as Helena and Hargrave interact. The earlier suggestion that Helena has chosen wrong seems exemplified by these final moments. Hargrave lies bleeding on the ground and states, “Oh, Helen! I’ve obeyed thee – Helen! I go for ever” (182). Here, Hargrave gives Helena the final authority over



him, lending her power as an individual with the words “I’ve obeyed thee.” However, Helena seems simply unable to accept this and says, “Kill me – thy words will do it” (182). She basically hands back to Hargrave the authority he has just given her. With only a word, he could kill her, and thus she remains powerless and weak. Sophia jumps into the dialogue and states, “Rash, rash, mistaken man! what hast thou done?” (182). Earlier, it was Helena that had ascribed her own father’s “fiery rashness” to herself, and so, the following end of this scene seems to act as a sort of lesson, or moral reproach to masculinity. Though Hargrave ends up bearing the brunt of his folly, still Helena must suffer from the “unhappy fruits” of her rash actions: her decision to end the relationship, her carelessness with the letter, and her endless guilt for Hargrave’s rashness. It appears Sophia, who continues to bemoan Hargrave, suggests this is where rashness gets you.

Though the end of this scene leaves room for a plethora of interpretations, many point back to the struggle that has consumed Helena throughout the entirety of the play as first internal, then external, and then ubiquitous. Hargrave pushes on for Helena’s word, “Yet – let me hear it once from thine own lips – My Helen! – thou forgives?” to which Helena retorts, “Hear him! hear him! -/ He mocks me with his dying breath – he sues/ In bitter irony to *me* for pardon - / Oh, cruel! – *my* forgiveness – and I’ve killed him” (184). It seems here there is a handing back and forth of power. And yet, sub textually there seems a rivet of blame towards Helena still present. Helena expresses that “He mocks me” and it seems he really does by begging, once again, for her forgiveness. Does he want her to forgive him for the deceit he never quite apologized for, or now forgive him for his “rash” suicidal decision?

It remains ambiguous, but regardless, Helena blames herself for this fatal end by exclaiming “I’ve killed him.” She does not express *how* she has killed him, for it is clear he has

killed himself literally, but does she assume that her brief repression of femininity has caused the death of Hargrave? As Hargrave bewails the women not to tell his mother, Helena states, “What’s her grief to mine?/ She’s not thy murd’ress – never steeled her heart/ As I did mine against thy prayers – break, heart!/ Proud, sinful heart! break, break, and pay for –” (184). These last lines of Helena’s say much, but also leave more to the imagination. She clearly portrays herself as Hargrave’s murderess and suggests her culpability is because of her steeled heart, her “Proud, sinful heart.” Again, pride reveals itself as a negative characteristic, equaled to sin and despair. But again, it was her pride akin to cool reserve for Hargrave that has contributed to his death. The fact that she acted rash in the beginning, that she struggled with her femininity and questioned the religious and social teachings of forgiveness as attributed to her sex, all of this has interwoven and displayed itself in her indirect fault in Hargrave’s death. However, more ambiguity exists in her final line, “break, break, and pay for –” as she faints, or dies; the audience remains unsure. Though this reaction lingers as weak, the fact that she does not finish her sentence and actually state just *what* she must pay for leaves room for ambiguity. Perhaps, by leaving this blank, she leaves off with a final, small bit of agency left. Or does her weak break off counteract any authority she may have kept? However, if the storm that brewed does represent a larger manifestation of Helena’s inner struggle, perhaps she does have the last say after all. As the scene comes to its final close, Hargrave reiterates the ambiguity of Helena’s fate,

She faints – or art thou gone before, my

Helen!

To await me – where? There is no place in Heav’n

For the lost wretch – Heav’n shuts her gates against

me,

I see the flaming sword – it flashes – there! (185).

Here, lightning strikes and the audience is left with its lasting impression that Helena has left the scene literally. But, does she remain metaphorically? Does her fading out reflect weakness or has another transformation taken place? Has she refused to beg further for forgiveness, to fully submit to a feminized transformation within societal constraints, and lastly refused to articulate what she must pay for with Hargrave's death? The narrator describes "A crash of thunder overhead" and Hargrave's final words are spoken; "Lo! there, His voice! -/ Is that a call to judgment? Mercy, Jesu!" (185). This final religious lament recalls judgment, and then death for Hargrave. The final sparks of lightning and crash of thunder may simply lend themselves to solemnity and scenery, but, they may be the real last manifestations of the anger boiling in Helena. The garden may reflect the wrong decision Helena made from Hargrave's and Sophia's temptations. By choosing to accept their arguments as truth, she inevitably denies her own position and thus Hargrave's ability to kill her with words becomes concrete. By tempting her to change her mind, he kills her agency, and encourages her to accept a false identity, one shaped and formed by patriarchy. But, these final moments may reveal a stronger Helena in the end. As mentioned earlier, Helena stops Sophia from lighting the dark, from denying the storm its full rampage. She also reacts to and against nature – the environment and also her own nature, as in her human characteristics and traits. It seems that for all her stubborn resolve as presented earlier, there remains left in Helena enough strength to finally withdraw from these expectations and limits of personality and to express herself once more in violent resolution. Helena may in fact reveal her true nature in the form of the storm. In the garden scene before the end of scene one, it was Helena who became enveloped by the garden, but now, as manifested through Nature, Helena comes to envelop the garden along with all the temptations that lie within it. In this reading of

the play, Helena gains her agency in the end, and so, her fainting/dying final act represents not weakness of body, but strength of conviction and a means to overcoming oppression.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

In conclusion, this play, while literally acting out the dramatic scenes of a lover spurned, offers deeper insight to a woman's psyche. A feminist perspective offers an examination of the character Helena as a woman struggling with her identity that wars with societal standards placed upon her in the form of gender construction. Caroline Bowles demonstrates a quite radical appeal for women of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to reject these gender constraints. Though the play's end with Helena's forgiveness and fainting could be read as a confirmation of her inevitable feminine weakness, I argue another way out for Helena. Through her internal struggle, a transformation seems to take place, resulting in a literal confrontation with her sister Sophia, who represents that weak and feminine side of Helena. Further transformation explodes into a violent outburst resolved by a seeming acceptance of femininity, until Helena's internal war finally manifests itself in Nature, thus overwhelming her ascribed feminine "nature" and becoming omnipresent and overwhelming, consuming the garden and all temptation that lies within it.

Throughout the first scene, a doubling takes place as on the surface Helena struggles with her decision to break off her engagement with Hargrave in the face of his deceit. Hargrave and Sophia both work to change Helena's mind and in arguing for feminine resolve and religious acts of mercy, they succeed. However, the dialogue also suggests something more difficult at work: an internal struggle of self, identity, authority, agency, and femininity. Helena reproaches Hargrave for breaking vows and insists that had he told her of his infidelity himself, she may have found forgiveness for him. It appears that Helena struggles with her femininity as identity and this manifests itself in the form of a foil, Sophia. The internal struggle reveals itself in a literal dialogue between the sisters and comes to a head in the violent outburst between the two.

At this point, a transformation takes place in which Helena seems to reject her own agency and authority and to fully accept her femininity and all that this represents.

As the first scene closes and the second proceeds, themes of religion and Nature continue and demonstrate a larger transformation. Though Helena appears to have rejected her agency and embraced her femininity, the natural world continues to act as the manifestation of her internal battle. Helena has sent a responding letter to Hargrave, in which she forgives him, but in a sudden twist of fate discovers she has sent back his letter to him, and hers lies undelivered. This results in Hargrave's hasty return and proceeding suicide. During this emotional drama, a more violent outburst explodes in the form of a storm, one that requires Helena to leave her body, the site of feminine weakness, and to become something larger than society's constraints can impose. Through this interpretation, Helena recovers agency, becomes all-imposing and reveals her true "nature," that of a storm, wild and dark and unwilling to be repressed.

While many themes interweave in this play and allow for a myriad of interpretations, one theme remains forerunner to the rest: Helena is a body constrained to her gender assignment by the society in which she lives, and only through internal insight and transformation can she shed these constraints and evolve as a body with agency, authority, and unique identity. The use of feminist perspective and the concept of gender construction help interpret the internal struggle Helena faces throughout the play, a struggle representative of many women in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England.

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